

The
SEVENTH-
DAY

OX

and Other
Miracle Stories
From Russia



Bradley Booth

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Published by Review and Herald® Publishing Association, Hagerstown,
MD 217411119

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15 14 13 12 11 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Booth, Bradley, 1957-

The seventh-day ox, and other miracle stories from Russia / Bradley Booth.

p. cm.

1. Seventh-Day Adventists—Soviet Union. 2. Animals—Religious aspects—Seventh—

Day Adventists. 3. Miracles—Soviet Union. I. Title.

BX6153.4.S65B66 2011

286.7'47—dc22

2010011258

ISBN 978-0-8280-2517-1

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BIBLES FOR BREAKFAST

BREAD FROM HEAVEN

CHAPTER 1

Nickolai Panchuk stared at the four walls of the jail cell around him. The cold gray concrete made him feel trapped as though he were in a tomb—cold and frightened and alone.

What would become of him? What was to be his fate? He had refused to cooperate with the KGB thus far—refused to betray the whereabouts of yet another fledgling church he had helped organize only a month ago. It wasn't a large church—just a company of believers in the city of Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine—but Nickolai had refused to turn over a list of the members to the KGB.

And who could blame him? The gospel message was spreading so fast that every few months, now, Nickolai was forming yet another company of believers. At present he was shepherd and pastor of eleven such congregations.

Groups typically met to worship in houses and cellars and barns, but 15 or 20 members seemed to be the magic number before the group was considered too large. The places they met were just too small to hold more than that number. Then too, everyone loved the close-knit family feeling they experienced from being part of a company of Seventh-day Adventist Christians.

Nickolai leaned back against the cold wall of the prison cell and closed his eyes. The peace that came from worshiping with like believers was more than enough pay for the pain and hardship he had faced during the last few months. It wasn't easy, but he was getting used to it. Five times now the KGB had cornered him to find out information about the Seventh-day Adventist Church members who were meeting in scattered companies in the towns and small villages of the area. Twice they had come to his house, and three times they had used a public confrontation to humiliate him and try to make him talk.

The KGB needed that crucial list of church members—without it everything was a hit-and-miss operation for them—like sifting for needles in the chaff of a haystack.

Fortunately for Nickolai, the KGB in the area where he lived were decent enough to leave his family out of it. Other pastors in Russia had not been so lucky. Nickolai had heard terrible stories of what the KGB sometimes did to get pastors to talk.

But Nickolai always remained steadfast and determined in his promise to

leave everything in God's hands. His faith was strong. He would not betray the church members and their trust no matter what the cost to himself or his family.

But this time the interrogation process was different—it was obvious the KGB had something else in mind for Nickolai. When he had first arrived at the KGB headquarters, they had sat him in a chair and kept him awake for more than two days. They had used the proverbial bright lights in his eyes, shouting tactics, and even threats of where they might send him to help straighten him out.

But all to no avail. Nickolai had remained undaunted and unmovable. Their tactics did not intimidate him. Unfortunately, the KGB were more than persistent. They were determined! What was to come next was anybody's guess, though Nickolai felt it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure it out.

He was considered an enemy of the state. Christians were high on the list of rebels who needed to be reformed and retooled for society. If they could be punished enough, maybe they would finally see the light. Those were the words from the top on down, but Nickolai guessed that few in the upper ranks of the military ever bothered themselves about what actually happened to pastors like Nickolai. As long as the KGB methods produced results, they cared little about the details.

Nickolai wondered what time it was. He had no watch, and the scant meals they brought him were the only indications that time was passing, though he was sure he had been in his cell for several days now. For Nickolai, time seemed to stand still.

Suddenly Nickolai heard footsteps coming down the long concrete corridor. The footsteps slowed and then stopped in front of his cell, and he could hear a hand fumbling with a key in the door. "On your feet!" a voice barked.

Nickolai scrambled to his feet in time to see a big burly figure fill the doorway. A lone 40-watt bulb burning in the corridor cast eerie shadows past the hulking frame. Nickolai assumed that the man was one of the guards who had been bringing him his meals since he had arrived.

"The Boss wants to see you!"

Nickolai waited for the guard to give him specific orders, but the big man simply pulled him into the corridor and pushed him in the direction he wanted him to go.

They went up a flight of concrete stairs, and then down another hallway until they came to a big room with a large desk in it and two straight-backed

chairs. Other than that, the only thing in the room was another lightbulb burning feebly high overhead.

Behind the desk sat an intimidating officer in a gray-green uniform— a manila folder lay open on the desk in front of him. He never bothered to raise his eyes when Nickolai walked in, but continued staring at the contents of the folder over horn-rimmed reading glasses. A shot glass and bottle of vodka sat on the desk beside him, and a long cigarette dangled from his clean-shaven mouth.

Nickolai remained standing, not daring to sit down in the second chair. Whatever was coming next would no doubt be better received standing up.

“Preacher man!” The officer threw out the expression he had been using on Nickolai for the past several days. “Have you given my proposition some more thought?” The officer still did not look Nickolai in the eye, and Nickolai was grateful for it. Eye contact was a code of intimidation with the KGB. If a prisoner should respond to such a gesture with eye contact of his own, it was understood that the victim was ready to finally come to some kind of agreement.

And for Nickolai, that was impossible. He knew he could never bring himself to agree to the KGB’s terms that he reveal the list of the church members in his district! Never! Never in a thousand years!

But the officer was waiting, and Nickolai knew there was nothing for him to do except tell the “Boss” exactly what he had told him before. His mind was made up—there would be no compromise, no “deal.” For Nickolai there was no other choice, and he knew the officer would soon grow impatient because of it.

“I’m sorry, sir, but I can’t comply. My God and my conscience won’t allow it.”

The officer pushed Nickolai’s folder away and folded his arms across his chest. Nickolai kept his eyes fixed on the wall behind the officer’s head, but he could tell that the man was staring at him over the tops of his glasses, and it made him nervous.

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